

Henckel's demand

"Good morning, Doctor," began Henckel, speaking in perfect French. He didn't even look at Mardieu; he simply continued to sign papers on the desk. His thin black hair was flat against his head, and his face was pointed and sharp.

Mardieu said nothing. He knew the stories about Henckel. He knew the German never showed any pity. Henckel's actions were sometimes so extreme that even his own men were said to question his orders. But, of course, they only ever did so in whispers, never to his face.

"You know why you are here," continued Henckel, still not looking up.

It was a statement, not a question, but still Mardieu answered, his mouth dry. "I know."

"Then you will understand that you must be punished for your actions."

"I know that you will want to punish me for what I've done. That at least makes sense. But I don't understand why you're punishing so many others. The people in the cellar have done nothing wrong. They aren't the ones who attacked you yesterday."

At last, Henckel put down his pen and looked up, annoyed.

"You forget, Doctor," he answered, "that although Germany has beaten France, there are still some who

believe we remain at war. And so, until those people agree to be ruled by us, that war will continue. Those people in the cellar are therefore the enemy. And until I catch the people directly responsible for yesterday's attack, they will remain there."

"Some of them are old. They won't survive without medical attention!"

"Then Dubois will be responsible for their deaths."

Like everyone in Tierroy, Mardieu knew of Dubois. Dubois was the leader of the local Resistance and was admired by the French as much as Henckel was feared. Nothing was known for sure about Dubois. Some said he was an old soldier who learned to fight in the First World War. Others claimed he was a local farmer whose family had been killed by the Germans. And some thought that Dubois wasn't his real name at all, and that he was really a British agent sent over to help organize the Resistance.

Whatever the truth about Dubois, he had continued to fight Henckel and his men when the rest of Tierroy had given up. His group of Resistance fighters continued to upset Henckel's plans with growing regularity, and the German commander had clearly had enough.

"When Dubois is caught," continued Henckel, "I'll let everyone go. Not before."

"That's . . ." began Mardieu, but Henckel interrupted with a shout.

"Silence! You are not here to discuss my decisions!" In his anger, the German rose to his feet. At the movement, he began to cough badly and placed one hand on the big desk for support.